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Ultra Secret': We Know Too Much, Too Little

The most important—and the most sturbing—secret of World War II has cently been disclosed. In "The Ultra ecret", Group Captain F. W. Winterotham reveals that the British broke e German secret radio code. Well beore America's entry into the war and ntinuing until V-E Day, messages beeen the Nazi High Command and erman field generals were deciphered the British within hours, often within inutes of their dispatch.

"Ultra" played a vital role in every ajor Anglo-American military campign against the Germans. Winterotham maintains that without information from "Ultra" that the German my was cracking, British and Ameri n forces would have moved eastward uch more cautiously and would have ined the Russians at the Rhine ther than at the Elbe. All of Gerany would have been under Soviet ntrol. Journalist Alfred Friendly, who as a member of the Ultra group, says atly that Ultra "made victory posible - 1945."

The tremendous strategic and tactil advantages accruing to British and merican forces as a consequence of is historic intelligence breakthrough ises an ugly question: Why did not e Anglo-American Command share is information with the Soviet Union hich, after all, was engaging the bulk the German forces? Conceivably, if e information had been shared, the ar could have been concluded even oner than the spring of 1945, thus ving millions of lives. A school of storians, the "revisionists", has long aimed that the Western Allies purued a peripheral strategy—North Afca, Sicily, Italy—instead of mounting early frontal assault on Normandy, part at least, to exhaust the Russians. They will surely now claim that ilure to share "Ultra" with Moscow oves their point.

But before they seize their pens, ey might do well to ponder a less sinister, more plausible explanation. Communication Intelligence is the crown jewel in the vaults of every spy establishment skillful enough to acquire it. Many CIA, MI-6 or *Deuxieme Bureau* officers will grudgingly admit that many of their "secrets" can be divined from a close reading of The Washington Post, the London Times or Le Monde. But when they smugly add "except for the critical five per cent", they are referring to communications intelligence. It is this that makes the difference between "will" and "might", between "probability" and "certainty".

Even now, communications intelligence is held extremely closely, for continuing access to such vital information depends on the discrmination with which it is used. When a potential or actual enemy realizes that you know (not suspect, not guess, but know), years of painstaking effort can be lost and a nation's ability to anticipate future grave threats to its national survival could be jeopardized. There is also the awful possibility that Actor Leslie Howard was sent on a secret mission in an unarmed, unescorted plane even though the British apparently knew the Germans were going to intercept his aircraft.

The British decision not to share "Ultra" with Moscow may well have rested on a national fear that in some manner—perhaps by moving conspicuously and precipitately to repel "surprise" attacks on major cities—Soviet generals might reveal to the Germans that their code had been broken. Moreover, it is important to remember Churchill's persistent suspicion that the Soviet General Staff had been penetrated by the Germans. None of this is to say that the British did not warn Stalin of the impending German invasion of Russia in the spring of 1941. Stalin was indeed told by Churchill that "unimpeachable sources" had revealed that Hitler was planning to move eastward. But Stalin ignored the warning. Before making a final judgment, we must ask how much did Moscow know about German plans and intentions which it did not choose to share with London and Washington?

One can speculate, but having allowed publication of the details of Ultra, the British have opened a Pandora's box. We know both too much and too little. To stop a flood of unhealthy suspicion and a torrent of recrimination, London must now tell us more.

SOC 4.01.2 The Ultra Secret
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